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I1. (C/NF) Summary: CoR Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani is becoming more comfortable in his role as leader of Iraq's parliament, though he continues to breed controversy on a regular basis and is prone to emotional outbursts in the CoR chamber. Behind the scenes, Mashadani has become a legislative "deal maker." His ability to pull off the passage of a three law package on February 13 (amnesty law, 2008 budget, and provincial powers) testifies to his skill at negotiating agreements between bloc leaders. While his management of CoR sessions rubs some the wrong way, he pushes MPs to work harder, sometimes threatening to dock salaries if MPs are not present. In the past six months, he has become more focused on legislative progress and results. On a biographic note, Mashadani fancies himself something of a poet, a hobby that his fellow MPs sometimes rib him about. End summary.

MASHADANI BOUNCES BACK

I2. (C/NF) Mashadani is a master at both breeding and deflecting conflict. He wears his troubled past proudly, and joked with his Second Deputy Arif Teyfour months ago, "I used to be a 'terrorist,' but look at me now." He has a strong propensity to annoy and anger CoR members, particularly the Kurds and Sadrists. Mashadani was almost ousted last year (June 2007) as a result of an altercation between his security detail and another MP (ref A). The attempt to remove him reflected cumulative frustration with Mashadani's brusque manner, combative outbursts, and even physical violence (i.e. slapping a member). However, the seemingly teflon-coated Speaker bounced back in fine form. On July 19 he was back in the Speaker's Chair, and his return was accompanied by the Sunni Tawafiq bloc (and the Sadrists two days earlier) (ref B). How Mashadani was able to keep his Presidency of the CoR remains a mystery to most MPs. One MP (Safia Souhail) told PolOff Ayad Sammarie was set to replace Mashadani before a "deal was made." (ref C)

I3. (C/NF) History almost repeated itself for Mashadani during the last few days of the most recent legislative session, which ended February 13, 2008 with the passage of the amnesty law, 2008 budget, and provincial powers law. On the eve of February 12, the CoR continued a session from earlier in the day, but Mashadani's call to vote on the amnesty law as a whole after it was read item-by-item threw the entire chamber into chaos (ref D). The Dawa Bloc leader (Ali Al-Adeeb) yelled, "This was not the deal," and minutes later a walkout caused a loss of quorum. That night the Sadrists held a press conference to dissolve the CoR and elect a new one. One Kurd, Bari Zibari (PUK) told PolOff that the Kurds blamed

Mashadani's behavior for the breakdown since everyone, he said, "knew the deal was to read through each law item-by-item and then vote on the three as a whole." He added the Kurds, out of frustration, wanted to either get rid of Mashadani or change the entire CoR Presidency Council, or simply dissolve the CoR altogether.

14. (C/NF) Even on February 13, the day of the successful three-law passage, a young, angry Sadrists charged the leadership podium and threw his fists at Mashadani's face -- missing by mere inches -- during the controversial vote on whether to hold provincial elections by October 1, 2008. This followed a dispute on the vote count which caused chaos to ensue for over ten minutes among all the bloc leaders and members, but Mashadani and CoR Deputy Speaker Khalid Attiyah ultimately restored peace and announced the provision passed.

Had the Sadrists' fist edged just a few inches closer and seriously hurt Mashadani, it is possible the fate of the legislation (and the CoR) that day would have moved in a much different direction. However, given the success, Speaker Mashadani - as well as the whole CoR Presidency Council - are now considered heroes for achieving such miraculous legislative results. How Mashadani and his two deputies manage the veto of the provincial powers law, which occurred February 26, and push forward other important pieces of legislation (i.e. hydrocarbon law) will be a real test of their leadership.

MASHADANI GROWS INTO HIS LEADERSHIP ROLE

15. (C/NF) While Mashadani is still a little rough around the edges, he is beginning to grow into his Speaker role. Shepherding the passage of the budget package took

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considerable negotiating skill. Compared to six months ago, he is more focused on passing legislation and talks a great deal about serving the needs of the Iraqi people. He is also more cooperative in general, both with embassy interlocutors and with other MPs in listening to ideas and disagreements. He also tries to press the CoR members to accomplish more each day. During the week leading up to the successful passage of the three laws on February 13, he encouraged members to also take up second readings on other pieces of legislation. He may have reached the moment, where he feels he has "arrived" as a leader and is less insecure. Especially during the last days of this past CoR session, he also seemed to be working more hand-in-hand with his two deputies - First CoR Deputy Speaker Khalid Attiyah and Arif Teyfour.

MASHADANI'S SOFTER SIDE

16. (C/NF) An amateur poet, Mashadani has published a book of poetry that can be found lying around the CoR in various places. Most of the poems are about his affection for his wife and daughter. Some people compliment his poetry. Others, however, make fun of Mashadani's status as a poet: one MP told us Mashadani should leave his CoR Speaker position and "run off to the hills" to write poetry. The back cover of Mashadani's book features a picture of the poet looking deep in thought with his hand on his forehead and rays of light emanating in every direction. He wrote his current poetry book in 2005 while imprisoned in Abu Ghraib and claims he had to "smuggle" it out with him. He wrote three other books of poetry, which were destroyed in raids against his home. He was born in 1948 and deeply cared about political issues in his youth. He graduated from the College of Medicine of Baghdad in 1972 and then joined the army as a physician with the rank of first lieutenant. In 1980, he was arrested for political reasons, but charges were dismissed after two years. He was again arrested for his political activities in 2000 and convicted for fifteen years, but was released as part of an amnesty arrangement. He was arrested

in 2005 as part of the armed resistance. He was elected Speaker by the CoR in 2006.

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